Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission
Conseil de la radiodiffusion et des télécommunications canadiennes
Canada

News Release

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CRTC GIVES VIDÉOTRON SHORT RENEWAL TERMS FOR ITS CABLE LICENCES -- DISTRIBUTOR MUST IMPROVE SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING

OTTAWA/HULL -- The CRTC today renewed Vidéotron Ltée's licences for cable systems serving the Montreal and Quebec City areas, as well as the Victoriaville and Cap-de-la-Madeleine municipalities (Decisions CRTC 95-264, 95-265, 95-266 and 95-267). With the exception of the Cap-de-la-Madeleine licence, which was renewed until August 31, 2001, Vidéotron's licences were renewed for short terms ranging from two to four years, instead of the 7-year maximum permitted by the *Broadcasting Act*. Today's decisions follow an October 1994 public hearing in Montreal.

"The short licence terms reflect the Commission's dissatisfaction with Vidéotron's performance and commitments in the area of community programming," said CRTC Chairman Keith Spicer. The provision of adequate funding for the community channel is the cable distributor's principal obligation to the public, in exchange for the privilege of holding a licence."

"We consider Vidéotron's lack of support for community programming to be unacceptable given the resources at its disposal, its leadership role in the cable industry and its substantial investments in advanced technology in Canada and abroad," Mr. Spicer explained. "During the next licence terms, we will closely monitor Vidéotron's implementation of the conditions of licence governing its contributions for community programming as well as the outcome of the licensee's reassessment of its role in the area."

Community programming requirements

The Commission, by majority vote, has decided to impose a condition of licence requiring that Vidéotron devote annually to its Montreal and Quebec City community channels at least 3.5% of the revenues from the base portion of its basic monthly fees. The greatest portion of this funding must go towards the acquisition or production of programs. In Victoriaville, Vidéotron is expected to increase its funding of the community channel beyond the amounts proposed, to the same levels allocated for the Cap-de-la-Madeleine system.

The Commission also expects Vidéotron to establish a professional training program for volunteer workers and specialist employees. Moreover, the licensee is invited to encourage the public to use its community facilities, in fulfilment of its existing access policy.

Finally, the Commission expects Vidéotron to submit a plan of action including specific recommendations and appropriate budget provisions, as proposed, by June 30, 1995.

Other expectations

In addition to community programming, other issues were discussed at the public hearing, notably Vidéotron's approach to television violence, its customer relations and employment equity practices, as well as the impact of its proposed investments in new technologies.

Regarding television violence, the Commission welcomes Vidéotron's initiatives to give parents more control over what programs their children can watch using the Vidéoway terminal. "We congratulate Vidéotron," said Mr. Spicer, "on the leadership role it has taken in the cable industry in the area of TV violence, and hope that other cable companies will emulate Vidéotron's strong commitment."

The cable company is expected to file revised customer relations policies and guidelines as soon as its current review is completed and, within the next six months, a report on the implementation of its new employment equity policy.

Finally, the Commission has obtained the assurance that basic service subscribers would not subsidize the company's proposed investments in new technologies and multimedia services.

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